The Black Cat

FEBRUARY 1907

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John Colephoon

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The Black Cat

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Smith's Wife.*

BY HOWARD DWIGHT SMILEY.

"WEALTH!" snorted Bagley, kicking a two-thousand-dollar sack of gold-dust under the bunk. "Wealth!" he repeated, in the tone of voice you used the day you went fishing and it rained.

"What's consuming you?" I inquired.

"There ain't anything consuming me, and — and *vice versa*," he answered, cross as a bear in a trap.

"*Vice versa*," said I; "who's he?"

"He!" answered Bag, in his rainy-day voice. "Who said anything about 'he'?" If you only understood the simple rudiments of the American tongue, you'd know that *vice versa* means the other way. There ain't anything consuming me and I ain't consuming anything — that's fit to eat."

"Oh," said I, taking my feet off the stove, "if, by that, you mean to infer that my cooking — "

"I ain't casting any reflections on your cooking," he interrupted. "You *can* cook, if you only had the where-all to do it with. That's what I'm kicking about.

"Look at that," he continued, pointing at the sacks of gold-dust that were piled up against the wall like cord wood. "Wealth,

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wealth beyond the dreams of John D. Avarice! But what good is it doing us I'd like to know? Why, there is enough gold stacked up against that wall to buy all the ham and eggs in York State, if we were only there."

"Well, that's consoling, ain't it?" I said. "We're going to start for there just as soon as Smith gets back with that pack train. In the meantime, just calm yourself and have some beans."

"Beans!" he answered, out of his mouth, with both lungs pushing. "Do you think that all I am made for is to eat beans? I want some pie and some milk that is out of a real cow, 'stead of a tin one, and I want some coffee to put it in. I've been laboring in these diggings all winter, shoveling, drilling, blasting, and washing, and doing it all on beans. Beans for breakfast, beans for dinner, beans for supper, et cetera, till I am ashamed to look the bean sack in the face. It's pie I'm hankering for now. Do you understand? Pie!"

"Well, I reckon you can have some," said a sweet feminine voice, coming from nowhere in particular and most any old place in general.

There may be a few things left in this mundane sphere that can stir up my cerebro excitant enough to cause a period of momentary aberration, and that was one of them. When I come to, I was on my feet with a .45 Colt in one hand and the frying-pan in the other; Bag was under the table, and in the doorway stood a lady.

Try and imagine my feelings; there was Bag and me in the midst of the Seven Devils, with the free and independent state of Idaho stretched all around us, and not another living soul within a hundred miles of us, that we knowed of; and there was Bag hankering out loud for pie, when, suddenly, out of the midst of the solitudes, and without warning, that female speaks up and says: "Well, I reckon you can have some."

"Would you mind," I asked, as soon as I could get my voice back into my mouth, "telling an anxious inquirer where in the hotel you dropped down from?"

"Weiser," she answered. "I've got your pack team here. I'm his wife."

"His wife," I asked, "who's *he*?"

"Why, Mr. Smith, of course, who'd you suppose?"

I wasn't supposing, I was getting beyond that. "Oh!" said I.

"Yes," she continued, "Mr. Smith and I were married in Weiser three weeks ago and started for camp together, but he broke his leg about three days back and I had to leave him and come on alone. I've got him fixed up nice and comfortable though, with plenty to eat and my Bible, so's he won't get lonesome. He said for me to tell you to pack right up and start back just as soon as ever you could."

"Yes, ma'am," said I, thinking of the Bible. Give me time and I can reconcile myself to most conditions, but the idea of her leaving that heathen a Bible to keep him from getting lonesome hit my funny-bone such a whack that I wanted to just double up.

The only Bible that ever appealed to Smith was the one that he carried habitual, in his inside vest pocket. It consisted of fifty-two pages, put together on the loose-leaf system, with thirteen illustrations, including the joker.

Still, that was her credential. The fact that Smith was wedded to a lady who could induce him to remain alone in the wilds and fastnesses of the Seven Devils, with nothing but a broken leg and a Bible for company, was sufficient in itself to convince me that she must be all right.

"Yes, ma'am," I said. "We'll be packed up and under way the first thing in the morning."

"All right; and if you'll build a fire in that stove I'll bake you that pie," she said, to Bag.

"Well, I'll be slammed," he answered, or words to that effect, and I wasn't blaming him much either.

"Sir," said she, with her nose on a bias, "I took you for a gentleman."

"Well, what do you take me for now?" he asked. "A piece of cheese?"

"That'll go better with pie than your conversation will with a lady," she retorted.

"You shut up and get busy with that fire. You're going to get what you've been hankering for now," said I to Bag, and went out to look at the pack team.

There they were, six husky mules; but none too many to tote out the load of gold we had accumulated during the winter.

Bag and I slept under the stars that night, giving Mrs. Smith the privacy of the shack. We were up bright and early, and while Bag and I packed the gold and the rest of our belongings on the mules, Mrs. Smith got breakfast.

While we were eating it she went over to her pack and dug out a quart bottle of whisky.

"Mr. Smith bought this so you could drink a parting toast to the camp," said she. "He wanted to bring more, but I wouldn't let him."

"Didn't he keep any for himself?" I asked.

"My husband can't drink whisky and be my husband!"

"Bill *is* a good old soul, ain't he?" I remarked, thinking of that Bible.

Bag emptied his coffee out and reached for the bottle.

"The moment has arrived," said he, "that I have looked forward to for many long and ard'ous months. I came to these parts a lone and unpecunious stranger; I am leaving them rich beyond the dreams of old Creosote. Fill up," said he, passing the bottle to Mrs. Smith.

"Thank you," she answered, "I never indulge; I'll drink mine in coffee."

So Bag and I filled our cups and he continued:

"Old shack," said he, with his eyes on the rafters, "as I gaze on your rough and smoke-blackened walls, that have so long sheltered me and mine comrades, and which I am now leaving, alas, forever, a feeling akin to —— to ——"

"Here's how," said I.

"Same to you," he answered, and we drank the toast.

"I'm about as decently familiar with inebriative liquor as the next man, but I never had anything get into the upper story quite so quick as that dose did. Inside of ten minutes things began to swim, and in about two more I saw that it was time to move. I was just able to get on to my feet and that was all; everything in the shack was romping around like a merry-go-round.

I remember making a grab for the table when it went past, but missed it and went down all in a heap. Next thing I knew I had walked over a precipice and began to fall; I fell and fell, until I began to wonder when I was going to hit bottom. Then I struck

a hill and started rolling; bumping and banging along so hard that I commenced to wake up and realize that some one was shaking me.

"'S'matter?" I asked, with both eyes shut.

"Wake up," said a voice that I supposed had a broken leg; and I opened my eyes to find Smith standing over me.

"'S'matter?" I asked again.

"You've been doped," he answered.

He had to fuss around for quite a spell before he could get Bag and me in a condition so that we could understand what had happened.

"It's all my fault," he explained. "I met that woman in a concert hall, down in Weiser, one night; and during an earnest conversation, both liquid and vocal, I imparted to her valuable information appertaining to our whereabouts and the frenzied state of our finances.

"I didn't think any more about it until yesterday, when I met her and a man about two miles down the trail. The first intimation I had of their presence in that vicinity was a request from the man to hold up my hands, and, as he was backing it up with an iron argument, I had to comply. He tied me to a tree and kept me company until the lady returned this morning with the pack train. Then they took my boots and gun and turned me loose, while they went over the hills and far away."

"Where's my boots?" yelled Bag. "I'm going after them."

"She has taken all our boots," answered Smith. "We can't travel."

"Then you ain't married after all?" I asked.

"Married? Certainly I'm married," answered Smith.

"And what's become of your wife?" I asked.

"My wife?" said he. "She's in Homestead, Pennsylvania, or at least she was the last time I heard of her. But what's she got to do with this affair?"

"Nothing," I answered, thinking of that Bible.

A Penny Walk.*

BY JOHN COLQUHOUN.

HE uniformed bell-boy bowed me politely into the street. He had been very attentive in showing me over the apartment, and I thanked him as courteously as possible. I fear, however, that my manner was not entirely of the suavest, for, to tell the truth, I was in a most disagreeable humor. This was the twelfth apartment I had inspected that morning, and each one had seemed, for our purposes at least, a little less desirable than its predecessor. I had assured my wife, before she left for a week's visit at her mother's home, that I would find precisely the furnished apartment we needed, before her return. I was now half-way through the fourth day's profitless search, and the job was getting on my nerves.

A neighboring church-spire clock confirmed my inward feeling that lunch-time was at hand, so I walked to the near-by avenue, with its roaring elevated and clattering surface cars, and was soon busied in temporarily forgetting my troubles over a substantial meal. The respite was not of long duration, for, with the black coffee and accompanying cigar, came meditation — and with meditation a renewal of my perplexity. I had completely exhausted the list for the day, carefully compiled from advertisements in the papers and inquiries at numerous real-estate agencies, and was really at a loss to know where to turn. Perhaps the next morning's papers would have additional advertisements. But I felt that I ought not to waste the afternoon; although my previous exertions might fairly entitle me to half a day's rest. However, I could not justify myself in entirely abandoning the task even for half a day; so I racked my brains for some scheme by means of which I might discover pastures new.

Curiously enough, as I sat there engaged in unproductive spec-

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ulation, my mind jumped back to a boyish recollection, which had no apparent connection with my train of thought. I recalled a most singular old gentleman who had visited us many years ago, and who used to claim that he had derived much amusement and experienced many strange adventures from a habit which he had acquired or originated, of taking what he called "penny walks." His method in pursuing this peculiar pastime was as follows:

He would start from his house, go to the nearest street-corner, and toss up a cent. If it came down "heads," he turned to the right; if "tails," to the left. In either case, he walked one block and then continued his progress by repeating the process at that and each subsequent street-corner. I smiled as I remembered how he would reel off a string of adventures and scrapes into which he claimed to have been thus led by the Goddess of Chance (or the penny), that would discount Baron Munchausen's most famous exploits.

We had none of us much faith in his tales or his "penny-walk" plan, being essentially matter-of-fact and unimaginative people. Nor do I think any of us had ever tried the scheme ourselves, considering it to be a very undignified and childish manner of obtaining amusement, and preferring, when we took the air, a straight-away five-mile constitutional.

Of a sudden it occurred to me, however, that here was a most ingenious and labor-saving device for experimenting with fortune. And incidentally, I reflected, it might result, by some outlandish freak of chance, in my securing the much-desired apartment. At any rate it seemed better than doing nothing at all in the matter of my quest, during the balance of the day. So regarding it as quite a satisfactory compromise between duty and disinclination, I speedily resolved to put my old friend's curious custom to the test.

Summoning the waiter, I paid my check and started forth with enthusiasm. At the door of the restaurant I took a handful of coins from my pocket to select the necessary copper. There were no pennies among them. But reflecting that one coin was as good as another for the purpose, I chose instead an old French silver coin which I had carried as a pocket-piece for some years. It had a particular value in my eyes as a pocket-piece, because it

bore the date 1813, and I carried it principally because some of my more superstitious friends had informed me that to carry a pocket-piece with a "13" in the date, was to ensure misfortune. Now, I despise all such superstitious notions, and I always do all I can to show my utter contempt for fears resultant from them. I invariably cross between the carriages of a funeral procession whenever I get a chance to do so. I am President of a "Thirteen Club." I always walk under all the ladders that come in my way, and I even persuaded my wife to marry me on Friday. So it was with considerable satisfaction that I selected this particular coin for the purpose of my experiment, with the determination to do all that I could to "hoodoo" Fate.

I glanced up and down the street for the nearest corner. As far as I could determine with the eye, I was precisely in the middle of the block. Consequently the plan must be put in operation at once. I tossed up the coin and it came down "heads" in my open palm. I turned quickly to the right and walked to the corner. Here the coin directed me to the left, and I departed from the noisy avenue of the elevated and surface cars and turned into a quiet residence street.

I strolled leisurely along, keeping watch for any promising apartment house, but there was none on the block. At the next corner the coin indicated a turn to the right and I passed down the avenue parallel to the one which I had started from. Then another turn to the right, through a parallel residence street, equally apartment-houseless, brought me back to the noisy avenue of the elevated road, a block below the point at which I had left it. "Left" said the coin, and I went down the busy thoroughfare; left again and I passed away into a third quiet residence street, also unproductive. Then down the parallel avenue; and again back by the next residence street to the elevated highway, and once more left, down that thoroughfare.

I paused at this point in disgust. It was decidedly annoying to be taken with such geometrical regularity through parallel and successive cross-streets and to be returned so unerringly at regular intervals to the very street of all streets which possessed no possibilities in the line of my search. And I stood uncertainly on the corner for a moment or two, half inclined to end the experiment

at once. But it finally occurred to me that I might better keep it up a little longer; so I decided to continue the operation until the repetitions had reached the much dreaded number thirteen, and if at that time nothing had developed, to abandon the scheme altogether.

I calculated that I had already made nine tosses. Four more remained therefore. So up went the coin again; down it came "heads" and once more I turned to the left into the residence street; the eleventh toss took me, as usual, down the parallel avenue, and the twelfth returned me with unfailing accuracy to the avenue of the elevated road. This was simply maddening, and I was becoming thoroughly exasperated. However, in accordance with my resolution, I made the thirteenth toss and proceeded down the detested avenue once more, following the relentless route forced upon me with such extraordinary persistence.

Now, if I were at all superstitious, I suppose I might have discovered in this somewhat remarkable repetition of chance an indication that I ought to continue the experiment indefinitely with a probability of eventual success. But I am not in the least afflicted with that weakness; consequently, all this simply impressed me as a series of very dreary coincidences, and I determined to put an end to them at once. So I replaced the coin in my pocket and glanced up at the street sign on the lamp-post to ascertain my whereabouts. The sign read, "18th St." Here was another tiresome coincidence. For the date on the coin was 1813 and the thirteenth toss had brought me to the corner of Eighteenth Street. It was becoming a sort of nuisance and I decided I would permit myself no further dalliance with such trivialities. Therefore, to show my contempt for my previous weakness, and to prove there was nothing at all singular in these happenings, I crossed under the elevated tracks and walked rapidly away down the street, in exactly the opposite direction from that which the coin had hitherto pointed out.

The first block contained nothing but disreputable tenements, stables and small shops. The second took on a better appearance, with respectable three-story brick dwellings. But in the third block I paused in surprise a few doors from the corner, before a decidedly good-looking, though somewhat old-fashioned apartment

house. Instinctively I glanced at the house number on the glass transom over the door. It was 318. "How absurd!" I thought. "Everything runs to thirteens and eighteens." At this moment a smiling negro attendant, who had been seated just inside the door, observed me standing there and gazing up at the house. He ran quickly down the steps.

"May-be you was a-lookin' for a furnished apartment, sir," he said. "I got something I'd like to show you if you was."

There could be no possible reason for not looking at it, I reflected, despite this numerical foolishness of coincidence. For I recalled that this would be the thirteenth apartment I had seen that day. So I followed him up the steps at once, and much to my delight was soon engaged in inspecting just the sort of an apartment I had been hunting for. The rooms were large and airy, and the parlor and dining-room gave out upon some pretty back yards of private houses in the rear. And I was particularly pleased with the parlor furniture. It was all so delightfully old-fashioned and commodious. Indeed, the chairs and two spindle-legged sofas looked as if they might have been fifty years old, though all were in perfect repair. There was, too, an air of extreme neatness about the whole place, while the few ornaments and little pieces of bric-à-brac displayed unmistakable evidences of good taste.

A short interview with the superintendent resulted in business arrangements satisfactory to both sides, and I paid a month's rental and departed for the nearest telegraph office to wire the good news to my wife.

On her return to the city, she was as much pleased with the place as I had been, and we were soon snugly ensconced in our new quarters and enjoying its comforts. I believe my wife forgot to ask me how I found the place, and I concluded it was hardly necessary to tell her of the silly little coincidences. Besides, really, I reflected, it was not until I desisted from the tossing-up process that I had made any progress whatever.

My wife took especial delight in the quaint old parlor furniture and was never tired of admiring it and talking about it, and wishing that, when we were able to afford a home in the country, we might have similar furniture for our parlor there. One chair in

particular caught her fancy. It was a large, high-backed rocker, with a broad seat and wide, cushioned arms. And it had curious bronze knobs at the ends of the arms and on the tops of the posts, which extended high up above the back. She often told me that she rarely sat anywhere else save in that chair during my absence at the office in the daytime, and I know that in the evenings it appeared to have an almost unaccountable fascination for her.

We made many conjectures as to where the furniture had come from, and who had formerly owned it. But ten years of city residence had proved the wisdom of never attempting to secure information from the employees of an apartment house unless you are prepared to gossip about all your neighbors. So we were content to rejoice in our good fortunes and ask no questions.

The pleasure we derived from the comforts of our new home was, however, much marred after a short month's residence therein by a change in my wife's health which occasioned me considerable apprehension. She appeared to be suffering from no perceptible malady, at least so far as I could detect, nor, indeed, did she complain of feeling at all ill, except that she admitted a strange loss of appetite for which she could not herself account. And this was the more incomprehensible because it was accompanied by a sensation which she described as being more like hunger than anything else. She would often talk in the morning, for instance, of how much she would relish a certain dish, and give instructions that it should be prepared for dinner that night. And yet, when the dinner hour arrived, she would be seized with a sudden aversion to all food, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she could be induced to eat more than the meagerest portion of anything. I questioned the servants closely about her conduct in this respect during my absence, and found that she rarely could be prevailed upon to eat more than a morsel at any time. I suggested various tonics and she consented to take them willingly enough, but they produced little or no beneficial effect. So that she began perceptibly to fall away in weight and to exhibit signs of weakness and lassitude which were most distressing to me, as she had hitherto been a woman of vigorous health and perfectly normal appetite.

My fears as to her physical condition were considerably aug-

mented, moreover, by a remarkable change in her disposition. She was by nature of a most vivacious and cheerful temperament, never depressed, and always merry and full of pleasant chat. Whereas now she rather avoided than sought conversation, although she was not irritable or fretful in any way. But it was extremely hard to arouse her interest in any of the occupations or pursuits which formerly afforded her entertainment or pleasure. I could never induce her to go out to dinner or the theatre. She even entirely ceased church-going, though she had been all her life an earnest and devout believer, and a faithful and constant attendant upon divine services. She retained her extraordinary fondness for the big rocking-chair, however, and would sit there by the hour at the window, rocking slowly back and forth and humming a little French chansonnette over and over again. I had never heard her sing this French song before, and asked her where she learned it. She could only vaguely answer that she supposed she must have learned it in childhood, though she could not remember where.

In spite of all this change she was not unhappy, but was entirely content with her life and surroundings. But I began to realize that she was living in a mental world of her own, from which all — even I — were excluded. I tried not to show her how much pain this caused me, but it was inexpressibly bitter to be deprived of the loving companionship and sympathetic interchange of idea and impression which had bound our lives so closely together.

As the symptoms grew worse rather than better, I called in our family physician, who had known my wife for fifteen years. He could discover no organic disease, and, although he questioned her most closely, was unable to elicit any information to assist him in assigning a cause for the peculiar malady which had taken possession of her. At his suggestion I employed an eminent specialist; but his examination produced no further light on the subject. Both doctors prescribed change of scene, and after much persuasion, I induced her to go with me to Atlantic City. We remained there only three days; for she grew perceptibly worse instead of better, and begged me so earnestly to take her back to our own little quiet home that I could not resist her entreaties.

She was now becoming so weak that she could not walk about

the apartment without assistance, and I was fairly beside myself with grief and anxiety, and nearly wild at my inability to procure some adequate remedy for her illness. She began, too, to be possessed of hallucinations, as her strength diminished; and of these the most curious was that she repeatedly expressed a longing to see France once more; to go home to France to die. It was as if she had been born there and was now overcome with homesickness for the land of her birth. And yet she had never been abroad, and knew nothing of France beyond the casual knowledge possessed by ordinarily well-educated persons.

By this time her extraordinary fondness for the old arm-chair had become a mania so strong that she would not stir out of it all day long. And, if we had permitted it, she would have slept in it at night. Indeed, she often begged us to allow her to do so, and seemed much aggrieved when we refused to grant this request.

We had just succeeded in getting her off to her room after considerable trouble on that account one night, and I had remained by her bedside until she fell asleep; then I returned to the parlor. I was too miserable to read, and sat there absorbed in my sorrow for a long time, glowering occasionally at the old rocking-chair. For I had begun to hate it as much as my wife seemed to love it. To me it took on all the semblance of a deadly enemy, because of its close association with her illness. Yet, to-night, I felt impelled, for some unaccountable reason, to sit in it myself; and finally, after some angry mental demur, I rose almost involuntarily and, crossing the room, drew it a little away from the window and seated myself. It was comfortable enough. There could be no doubt of that; and I leaned back and spread out my arms on the wide arm-rests, as was my wife's custom. I had been seated there but a few moments, pondering over her unfortunate condition, when I began to think of her strange hallucinations in regard to France. And somehow they seemed not so inexplicable to me now. I really began to feel quite an understanding of them, and wondered if, after all, it might not be a pleasant thing to die in the sunny, southern portion of that beautiful country.

With a violent start I came to myself in anger. "Curse the chair!" I ejaculated. "I believe it is making us all crazy."

It required a determined effort of the will to arouse myself; but I was now thoroughly enraged, and rising quickly I seized the huge brass knob at the end of the right arm of the chair and with a violent pull started to move it back to its usual place.

The tug was so sharp and sudden that, to my surprise, instead of moving the chair I only succeeded in pulling off the brass knob in my hand. Gazing at it in amazement, I discovered that it was hollow, and that a cotton plug had been inserted in the end. This I easily removed with my pocket-knife and then inverted the cylinder over the library table. A small sealed and addressed package fell out, followed by an old French gold coin and a little roll of thin writing paper. Unrolling the latter I found written thereon in a fine feminine hand, as even and regular as copper-plate, the following:—

"To whomsoever Le Bon Dieu in his mercy may entrust my message:

"I, Antoinette Bardeleau du Chateau-Rochambouille, formerly of the province of Languedoc in the south of France, do earnestly beseech you to perform this slight devoir, the last request of a dying woman. You will have found with this letter a little packet all addressed for the sending. This packet may not be despatched before I am gone. Alas, that I must confess my loneliness! I have no friend to whom I may entrust it. Fearing that after my death the service might not be performed by menial hands, I am compelled to commend it in this manner to the kind offices of an unknown stranger. Reimburse the necessary expense of the sending from the Louis d'Or. It is my last, and has been kept for this employment. Expect no reply, for none will come. But accept the small trust, and the blessing of the departed shall reach you from beyond the grave and bring peace and welfare to your house.

"Adieu! Receive my grateful salutations.

"A. B. DU C-R."

Then followed in a wavering and hardly legible hand:

"C'est fini. I shall go home to-night."

I picked up the golden coin from the table and, turning it over, glanced casually at the date upon the other side. It was 1813.

Again I felt the sense of annoyance at the numerical coincidence, recalling my own pocket-piece and the experiences of the day on which I had first seen our present home. I had tried continually to obliterate the silly episode from my mind, because of conviction that persons who knew me less well than I knew myself might have accused me of superstition, had they known of my ridiculous performances on that occasion, which were after all only in the nature of a jest. But the events of that day would persist in

recurring to me despite my wish to forget them, and especially since my wife's illness had I been plagued by this undesired recollection. And now this gold coin, with the ridiculous date, brought every detail of the day's walk back to my memory with surprising distinctness.

This was very exasperating, and I found every attempt to compose my mind quite useless. So, as sleep was impossible, I concluded to take a long walk to restore my mind to a more equable condition. I first replaced the knob in the arm of the chair, and mechanically thrusting the articles which it had contained in my coat pocket, sallied out.

The fresh night air was grateful and I walked along feeling a sense of relief from the exercise. As I turned into the broad avenue of the elevated road, which was brightly lighted and more pleasant to walk upon at night for that reason, I passed an "all-night" drug-store. The curious message and the packet in my pocket were fresh in my mind, and turning quickly into the store I had the package properly weighed and stamped, and deposited it in the branch post-office on the opposite corner. The performance of this slight task in a measure relieved me and, after a long walk, I returned home to enjoy the most refreshing sleep I had experienced in months.

The next morning I arose late, and when I came into the dining-room found my wife propped up in a chair at the table.

I succeeded in concealing my great surprise and delight at seeing her so wonderfully changed. For though she was still very weak, her whole manner was radically different, and she talked and laughed, though rather feebly, with quite her old spirit. It was as if some strange burden had been lifted from her. I could hardly believe the evidence of my senses, the transition was so complete. She ate a hearty breakfast with evident enjoyment, and chattered away like a magpie, and she was greatly amused because I had forgotten to look at the morning paper with my coffee, — an invariable habit of mine.

Suddenly she asked me, with a change of manner, if I would object to listening to a very strange dream she had had the night before. As a rule, I never allow people to tell me their dreams, not even my wife. I regard dreams as entirely useless and silly;

and I'm sure I have enough of my own to forget, without being bothered by those of other people. But of course this was an exceptional occasion, so I readily consented.

"I dreamed," she said, "that a little old lady, with the sweetest face in the world, — but oh! such a sad face, — was standing at the foot of my bed. She was dressed in quaint old-fashioned clothing such as you see in pictures of the ladies of the French nobility of one hundred years ago. I seemed to know her and yet not to know, and I seemed to be wide awake. Yet, I was not surprised to see her, and not at all afraid. She looked down at me with the very pleasantest smile and I thought she said:

"'Sleep sweetly, poor child; I will trouble you no longer, for it is now accomplished.'

"And then I seemed to fall asleep, in my dream, as she stood there smiling. But all at once I woke up in reality and I heard our little cathedral clock strike twelve. Wasn't that odd?"

I started involuntarily, though I laughed and made light of the vision. For in a flash, as I recalled finding the letter and the other two articles in the chair the night before, I remembered that, as I was mailing the little packet, I had heard the near-by church clock striking the hour of midnight.

My wife recovered so rapidly that at the end of two weeks I sent her away to the country to complete the cure. I was quite lonesome without her and, one evening shortly after her departure, invited the superintendent of the building, who was a pleasant young bachelor, to join me in a cigar and a glass of wine. The wine made him quite talkative, and as I had been pondering considerably, though much against my better judgment, over my recent experiences connected with the apartment, I decided to ask him something about the former tenant or tenants. At first he was disinclined to give me any information. But, finally, I said at a hazard: "Was there ever a French lady here?"

At this he yielded, stating that, as I evidently knew something, I might better be told the whole story. He hoped, however, that I should not repeat the story, even to my wife, as it was a tale which the proprietor wished to have forgotten, fearing it might injure his chances of renting the apartment.

There had been, he told me, a very old French lady who occupied

the apartment before our tenancy, and who went by the name of Madame Bardeleau. She had lived entirely alone there for some years, and never made any friendships with any of the other tenants, though she was always extremely polite when spoken to in the corridors or in the elevator. But there was something so reserved and distant about her manner that no one ventured to intrude upon the privacy which she evidently preferred. She went out every day and returned with one or two little parcels which were supposed to contain her supply of food, which she prepared herself over a little gas-stove. Toward the last part of her occupancy of the premises, however, she became so feeble that she was unable to go out, and then the grocer and the butcher called for orders, which, when filled, were sent up to her on the dumb-waiter, and for which she always paid in cash. One week she gave no orders whatever, though both tradesmen called every day. No one knew that anything was the matter, as she could be seen sitting in her old rocking-chair at the window, rocking back and forth, nearly all day, singing to herself, as had been her habit for some time. One morning her curtains were not raised, and, when the trades-people came, they got no response from her at all. An inspector for the gas company called that morning, for the purpose of taking a reading of the meter, but was unable to gain an entrance to her apartment. This started an inquiry which resulted in fears that she might be ill. And finally, no response being given to repeated knocks, the door was burst in. She was found dead in her old chair by the window.

The coroner reported that she died of inanition, and a subsequent search of the premises and interrogation of the tradesmen revealed the fact that she had purchased no food for over a week. No money or jewelry was found; but there was a brief note to the landlord asking that she be given proper burial, and that her furniture be sold to pay the expenses. The landlord complied with her request as to the burial, but instead of selling the furniture, decided to keep it and rent the apartment furnished.

There had been many rumors as to her former life, and the proprietor of a little French restaurant where she had been known to dine occasionally several years before she died, and who claimed to know something about her, said that she had come from a very

old and distinguished family of the French nobility, though he either could not or would not reveal the name. It was generally believed that she had exhausted all her resources, and being too proud to let her poverty be known, or to appeal for assistance, had chosen to die as she did, of starvation.

I had listened to this narration with an interest greater than that inspired by ordinary curiosity, as may be imagined. But I concluded it wiser to say nothing as to my discovery in the chair; especially as the landlord wished the whole affair forgotten. It is always well to be on good terms with one's landlord. But a strange impulse prompted one question.

"Was she a very old lady?" I asked.

"You can easily figure that out for yourself," responded the superintendent. "Her memorandum of the inscription she desired placed on her tombstone stated that she was born in 1813."

The outer bell rang and the superintendent, being summoned to some duties in his office, departed.

Once more that feeling of annoyance over these ridiculous and apparently unescapable coincidences! And this time I was more angry than ever at this tiresome number which continually intruded itself upon an otherwise tranquil and peaceful mind. I seized my hat and started out for a breath of fresh air. The night was too warm for walking, so, taking the elevated road to the ferry, I was soon seated on the upper deck of a boat enjoying the cool breezes of the bay. We were passing Liberty Island when I drew from my wallet the letter and the gold coin I had found in the chair, and from my little change pocket my old silver pocket-piece. I wrapped the two coins in the letter, tied the little parcel up tightly with a bit of string I found in my pocket, and dropped them gently over the railing into the water.

I wish to repeat that I am not a superstitious man, and it seemed to me entirely unnecessary that I should continue to burden myself with the possibility of such silly coincidences.

A Man and a Mermaid.*

BY W. GEORGE GRIBBLE.

R. JOHN FRANKLIN HIGGINSON, senior partner of the firm of Higginson & Rush, lay stretched at ease in his deck chair on a trans-atlantic liner. It was a perfectly calm night, and the sea was murmuring softly in response to the full light of the moon, which was making the night eloquent. Mr. Higginson had drawn his chair to a secluded corner of the lower deck where he was closer to the water and unsheltered from the heavens. He had dined full and well, and the fragrance of his cigar was deeply satisfying. He looked out over the silver world of water, and sighed slightly, as if troubled by the exceeding beauty of the universe.

The moonlight seemed to penetrate into his brain and there to discover something which had for years been buried under a mass of legal matter, deep in the recesses of his mind. Then something stirred, took form, and turned out to be a couplet of poetry:

> "Ah, moon of my delight—that knows no wane,
> The moon of heaven is rising once again!"

Mr. Higginson smiled. Where had he heard that? Then he remembered; it was at a musicale last winter, where some one had sung the lines just as he had entered the room. He flicked a long cone of ashes from his cigar and lost himself in further reflections. What should there be about a mere sequence of words to stir one's feelings! Poetry, as such, was all nonsense;—Higginson had come to that conclusion long ago; therefore, he reasoned, it could only be that it aroused memories of some former sensations, in the same way as might a perfume or a few bars of music. Presently another line of verse came pushing its way to the top of his dome

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $150 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending October 12, 1904.

of consciousness (Mr. Higginson, be it said, believed somewhat in the psychology of Herbart), "Where are the flowers of yesterday?" half murmured Mr. Higginson. He remembered perfectly, and with somewhat of a twinge of memory, the occasion of his first hearing these lines. They were introduced by Mr. Sothern in "If I were King!", and when they first fell upon the ears of Mr. Higginson, they served as a reminder that on the previous day he had neglected to send flowers to a certain lady.

From such distressing memories Mr. Higginson turned to wider and less personal thoughts, prompted by the beauty of the night. How luminous the water seemed to-night! It must be full of those phosphorescent animalcula Mr. Higginson had read about.

As he tipped off some more ashes from his cigar daintily with his little finger, he noticed how the ruby in his ring flashed in the moonlight. It was a handsome "pigeon-blood" ruby of considerable value. For a while Mr. Higginson watched the strange light it emitted under the rays of the moon.

From this musing Mr. Higginson's attention was again drawn to the water by something moving near the ship. Probably some larger species of fish, he mused, possibly — as there was a white flash — possibly even a porpoise. Then he remembered that porpoises come only in schools and leap out of the water. Mr. Higginson idly wondered at the swirling luminous water. Suddenly he stared below him. Strange! he thought, that might have been a white arm! He would have liked to have asked a sailor the meaning of such phenomena, but there seemed no one about; it was evidently late, as the passengers had all turned in.

Again came a white flash in the moonlight. Then a streak of whiteness, splashing and flashing in the shimmering water. Mr. Higginson gazed spellbound; sometimes nearer, sometimes farther off, whatever it was it kept well up with the steamer. Mr. Higginson felt a little ripple creep down his spine. Suppose it should be —! The thought was too unpleasant — besides, it was obviously alive and moving. Now it was quite close in,— and beyond a doubt, it had white feelers, which looked and moved like arms. Mr. Higginson's brain swam. Pictures by Böcklin came dancing before his mental vision. Then he shuddered, for there, in the moonlight, by the boat's side, swam a woman, beautifully nude!

What was he to do! Could it be some demented passenger? The French lady had seemed to him somewhat unbalanced. Then, he had heard of somnambulism. Great Scott! And he would be required as a witness in case anything happened! In a turmoil of emotions Mr. Higginson waved to the lady. She came nearer somewhat cautiously. He deemed it best to humor her and temporize, as she seemed such an excellent swimmer, hoping for help to appear meanwhile. A brilliant idea presented itself to Mr. Higginson.

"I suppose you are a mermaid?" he called, very softly. He heard only what sounded like a faint laugh, while the lady, as Mr. Higginson expressed to himself, moved with a gallic abandon through the water. Perhaps she didn't understand English. "Vous-êtes une petite nymphe, n'est-ce pas?" he called again, with a sympathetic side gesture, suggestive of aquatic origin. This time he heard an unmistakable and impudent little giggle.

Mr. Higginson tried another tack.

"I wish I were down there with you!" he said as enviously as he could — then he stopped and blushed as he remembered the full significance of his remark. He only hoped no one had heard him!

"Do you sing?— Chantez-vous?" he called again, hoping she would throw discretion to the winds in her desire to act out the part of a Lorelei, and thus attract the attention of the watch. This time his question was answered. Soft, like silver cadences, came the most exquisite singing Mr. Higginson had ever heard. He could not tell the words, but it sounded like "Weia-Wala, Wala-Weia!" repeated in ever changing modulations. The nearest approach to it he had heard was a part of that otherwise sadly muddled opera "Das Rheingold."

Like a sigh the singing ended, and Mr. Higginson scarcely yet breathed, afraid to lose a note of it. A laugh rippled up to him. There below him was the lady whose singing was only matched by her swimming.

Mr. Higginson once more became embarrassed at the propinquity of her gleaming body, but she seemed honestly and frankly unashamed. Her hair glistened like gold and silver in the moonlight, while one arm moved out of the water and in with scarcely a

ripple. She beckoned and smiled at him radiantly, and he saw she was no passenger.

"What do you want?" he asked, almost in a whisper. She made a gesture with one hand and the little finger of the other. He looked at his hand and saw the ruby shining there. He looked at her doubtfully. She made a pleading gesture and gazed at him so fully, that as in a dream he took off his ring and dropped it into the ocean. She caught it deftly as it flashed into the water and pressed it to her lips. "Thank you! thank you!" she exclaimed in perfect English.

"So you can speak English?" he queried. "Yes," she replied, and her voice sounded like a ripple of water. "I can speak any language once I have touched to my lips something belonging to one who speaks it." Mr. Higginson's mind ran over cases he had heard of witnesses who could only speak under the spell of a golden coin. "She might have asked for my handkerchief or my necktie," he thought to himself a little ruefully, but aloud he said, "Who are you?"

"You wouldn't believe me" she laughed.

"Not really!" he exclaimed, with a vague shudder. She nodded, and splashed the water up to him with a little laugh.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Do not move and I will tell you, as you have been so kind to me." And, softly splashing by the vessel's side, she told him the following, half singing in a curious, fascinating rhythm:

"My name is Pelagia, and I was born in a sea-shell in a cave of corals, many miles below the surface. Down there is a world of beings of all sorts — mermaids like me, mermen, oyster maidens, which grow from pearls; mothers-of-pearl, which are the mothers of the oyster maidens; coral dwarfs, which never come to the surface; and Sea Ancients, which are old men, descendants, they say, of the God Neptune. We have our laws and we are bound to keep them. One of them is that we may only appear once in our lives to human beings."

Mr. Higginson felt a subtle glow of satisfaction at these words.

"So you are having your night out?" he ventured. But she ignored his remark by diving under the water. When she came up she continued: "Have you ever heard of Undine?" He

remembered the name vaguely, but could not recall her story. "Well," she went on, "You should read it, for it is quite true. A recollection flashed through his mind. "Do you mean to say that that old story of mermaids not having souls, but being able to acquire them through human love, is true?" She nodded her head half sadly. "That is why we are allowed to show ourselves to a human being once in our lives." "And do you generally choose an ocean-liner?" he asked, thinking mermaids must be developing a sense for business. "Not generally," she replied, "mostly it is sailors or fishermen. But do you remember, last year, hearing of a very rich man who was lost at sea?" Mr. Higginson remembered perfectly — a very wealthy Wall Street broker who had thrown himself overboard from a transatlantic steamer. "Yes," he said, "I remember very distinctly." "Well, he is married to one of my friends," she said, with a mischievous glance that made Mr. Higginson shiver. "I hope he's happy!" he managed to say in a conventional tone. "Oh, perfectly!" she replied, coolly, "he gave her a most lovely engagement ring, almost as handsome as this one!" Mr. Higginson turned icy cold. "But," he choked, and his voice sounded strange, "that is not an engagement ring!" She sent out a ripple of laughter and splashed the water merrily, "Oh, yes, it is!" "And do you mean to say that I am affianced to you?" gasped Mr. Higginson. "By the laws of our realm you are bound to me!" she said, tossing her golden hair in the spray. "But I know nothing of your laws. By our laws — by the laws of Great Britain and the law of the United States — I am not bound to you or any woman!" His tone was almost defiant. "But, Sweetheart mine!" she laughed, "don't you see you are not in any one of those countries, but on the ocean, and should you not be tied by the law of the realm you are in?" An awful logic in her remark struck him speechless with horror. "Besides," she resumed reflectively, gazing at the ring, "you ought to be glad to have me. Am I not beautiful?" and with naïve frankness she half lifted herself on a little wave and clasped her hands behind her head, gazing up at him in a way to make him giddy and set his heart racing wildly. In truth she was gloriously beautiful! His antipathy for her seemed to melt into the moonlight.

"But I know nothing of your language, your customs, your laws," he expostulated weakly.

"You could go to school," she whispered, with a glance that made his heart stand still with ecstasy.

"School!" he said. "What school? Have you schools down there?"

"Of course!" and she smiled. "We have a school of porpoises which you might attend. That is where the rich man went to." There was a flash of merriment in her eyes, which wholly escaped him. He was bending over, devouring her beauty with his eyes. She stretched up her arms to him. "When," he whispered, "when shall I come?"

A yearning look crept into her face and her mouth seemed formed as if for an answer — or a kiss. His elbow and one foot were on the taffrail, when he was seized from behind with a grip of iron and forced backwards, while a gruff voice said in his ear:

"It's against the Cap'n's orders to jump overboard."

Mr. Higginson started, stared, and walked slowly to his state-room.

The Penitential Pig.*

BY BERTHA CURRIER PORTER.

HE last, sharp quarrel had been the proverbial straw, Mr. Brown representing the camel. Not that he resembled that long-suffering animal in any physical attributes, being short, stout, and exceedingly well fed. But he was much inclined to ruminative happiness and the almost constant bickerings in his family distressed him much.

In this last battle royal Mrs. Brown, Miss Brown, Master Brown, the Brown servant, and even the Brown baby had borne each a noble part. Mr. Brown, the non-combatant, wore scars, though they were all in the rear. He had fled as soon as possible, wisely silent, but with a bright idea flickering in his brain.

On the way home from his office he visited the five-cent store and emerged bearing under his arm a fat and untidy bundle.

When the aggressive Brown family gathered round their festive dinner-table great was the commotion. Mrs. Brown's fern-dish reposed on the floor in a corner, and in its place stood a placid and plethoric pig. Of heavy earthenware he was, mottled yellow and brown; his feet resembled those of a well-nurtured elephant and his snout matched his feet. Midway down his spine yawned invitingly a generous slit.

When there was a sufficient lull in the conversation to allow of his being heard, Mr. Brown spoke gently:

"Yes, it is a pig. He came from the five-cent store. He cost ten cents. He is ours. There is going to be a new rule in the family. Whenever there is any disturbance here like the one this morning, each and all persons taking part in it are to put their smallest piece of change, *whatever it may be*, in the slit in his back. When he is full we will break him and count the money. I will add the same amount, and we will spend it on some jollification for all of us.

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This includes Delia," he added, remembering certain sounds of strife that often floated out from the kitchen.

The hubbub broke forth anew.

Johnny jingled the pig gleefully for the next few days, as he grew heavier and heavier. But when he himself was caught, and his only piece of money was his week's allowance of a quarter it wasn't nearly so funny. He raged as he dropped it into the yawning slit, but he raged inwardly.

Mrs. Brown felt much the same when, her patience giving out, she had a good, old-fashioned tantrum and then found her pocketbook contained nothing but a silver dollar.

"That certainly won't go in," she thought hopefully, but the gaping orifice swallowed it greedily.

At first the pig fared well; then the supply grew scarcer and Mr. Brown was happy in the unaccustomed atmosphere of peace and calm which hovered over his household. Occasional spasms, however, had their inevitable results, and at last the pig was full. Not even another penny could be crammed among his vertebrae.

One Saturday afternoon the family assembled in solemn conclave. The penitential pig was about to be sacrificed.

"We'll go up into the library," said Mr. Brown, "and take a vote and decide."

"Pa," shouted Johnny as he clambered up the stairs bearing the still placid and unsuspecting pig, "can I bust his stummick?"

Gathered in the library, the pig was placed on a small table against an open window, and the family, including Delia, seated themselves. The Brown baby ran about the room unnoticed. Below in the street a hand-organ man ground out wheezy tunes. His monkey crouched on his shoulder.

"Now, what shall we do with it?" asked Mr. Brown, beaming. "There must be quite a little here. Speak up, everybody!"

"Buy a autermobile," piped Johnny, "an' I can run it."

"We really need some new curtains for the parlor," mused Mrs. Brown, "and we'd all have the good of them."

"Why can't we divide it up and each buy what we want to?" inquired Miss Brown, with visions of a lace waist floating through her mind.

The hand-organ man struggled bravely with the latest addition

to his repertoire. The monkey ran up the spout and perched on the window-sill, but nobody noticed him except the Brown baby.

"I have been thinking," said Mr. Brown, "I have given this matter serious consideration, and what do you say to this plan? Suppose we partially adopt Johnny's suggestion and hire an auto for a day. We will go somewhere up the river on a picnic; we can either take our lunch or buy it."

The chorus of acclamation which followed this suggestion, mingling with the strains of "Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be?" from the persistent hand-organ, completely drowned a terrific crash on the sidewalk.

"Well, then we will adopt that plan," said Mr. Brown, "Johnny, you may now 'bust his stummick'."

Johnny with a delighted whoop made for the table where had reposed the sacrifice. He stopped midway and the blank dismay on his face was reflected on the countenances of the whole family.

"Why, where is — "

"Where *can* he be?"

"Where *is* the pig?"

There was a slight diversion while Mrs. Brown hauled the Brown baby back from a perilous position on the window-sill, where he hung, gazing blissfully at something below. As she leaned out to grasp him she saw something on the sidewalk. Her scream brought the others to the window.

There on the pavement lay the fragments of the penitential pig — sacrificed indeed! At that moment the projected automobile picnic vanished into thin air. There was not left even the smell of gasoline!

Up the street was disappearing a delighted hand-organ man, richer by an unknown sum. The monkey on his shoulder spasmodically doffed his cap, and soon into the silence of the room, came, faint and far-away, the jubilant strains of "The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo!"

The Greater Appeal.*

BY JOHN M. OSKISON.

HE was no novice at the game, and knew Marks for a thief catcher as soon as she set foot on the station platform at Muscogee. No man among the criminal horde that infested Indian Territory in the early Eighties knew better than this woman how relentless "Jim" Marks was when once he set out to make a "catch."

Belle Starr's life had been a wild one in the sixteen years since she had, unwittingly at the time, married a horse thief and chosen to follow his fortunes. And though she knew that she, too, had long ago become outlawed, her mission now involved the breaking of no law, and it was not to her liking to fall into the watchful deputy marshal's hand.

One glance at the dark face of the officer, lounging apparently without a purpose on the platform, was enough. Belle Starr stepped unhesitatingly into the single main street of the little town and walked westward as if sure of her purpose. Nonchalantly nodding to a man, inconspicuous in the station crowd, Marks followed to the street a hundred feet behind the woman.

The second officer appeared, crossed to the opposite side of the way, and set out briskly westward as though unmindful of either his chief or the woman walking ahead.

"Well, she *is* cool!" exclaimed Marks under his breath, as Belle Starr passed into the "Boston Emporium," Muscogee's biggest store. His partner came across to join him.

"Go to the back door, Thomas," Marks commanded, "and keep her in sight whatever you do." The arrest was not to be made in the town's main street, now crowded with cowboys and half-breeds to whom a pretty woman might appeal with the certainty of enlist-

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ing help against even the law's accredited agents. Their work was to follow Belle Starr to whatever haven she was seeking, make the capture, and get her away as quietly as possible to Fort Smith, where she was wanted for horse stealing and robbery.

Marks lounged up to talk to a half-breed sitting stolidly on an empty, upturned goods box. He sat down facing the entrance to the "Emporium." Inside, bending over a glass showcase filled with ribbon and bits of cheap lace, he saw his quarry. She was thirty-three, a vigorous woman, too tanned and self-reliant in pose to be beautiful, but alive and magnetic, with snapping black eyes. All unhurried, and with a woman's love for deliberate choice, she picked out at last what looked to Marks like a mere shred of lace. It was made into a small parcel and paid for. She lingered a moment at the counter piled with remnants — that eternal trap for the feminine that lured here as strongly as in the great city shops — fingered a cheap parasol, and, still in the most leisurely way, passed out into the street without the slightest sign that she had seen Marks.

The deputy was sure of his game now, for she turned into a side street that, half a dozen blocks away, ran plump into the open prairie. On either side were the small, one-storied cottages and two-roomed shanties that sheltered the town's poorest citizens. Evidently Belle Starr was bound for an appointed rendezvous. Perhaps it was her husband, Sam Starr himself, whom she expected to meet in one of these small houses.

"But I could have taken my oath," Marks reflected, "that Sam Starr is fifty miles from here, down in the Creek Nation."

At the second shanty from the straggling street end, where a negro family lived, the woman, still regardless of the two men in the street behind her, turned in. She did not hesitate. Her grip of the latch was that of one who was expected, and who need use no formality. Marks waited until she was inside, then motioned Thomas to come up.

"You cut across lots here," he said, "and go around to the back door of the shack. Don't come in until I've had time to get inside. This looks too easy, Thomas," he added, smiling. "Just keep your eyes open."

He knew that Belle Starr's nerve was good, and knew, too, that

she could and would shoot in resisting arrest if she had an even chance. He stepped back into the shelter of a tumbled-down fence and shifted his pistol forward on his belt. In his manner of approach to the cabin there was neither haste nor apparent purpose. Following the woman's example, he lifted the latch of the door and stepped inside. Old Lizzie Burns, the negress who owned the shanty, was at work by the window sorting a pile of newly laundered clothes. Another negress sat before the open fireplace, bonneted and smoking a dingy clay pipe. The early spring air was sharp outside, and the dying coals gave forth but little heat.

"Hello, Lizzie," was Marks' greeting, "I came in to see your visitor."

"What's that, Mr. Marks?" queried the old negress, leaving her clothes and coming forward.

"I want to speak to your visitor," Marks repeated.

"Susan, Mr. Marks wants to speak to you," Lizzie Burns said to the woman by the fire. "Mr. Marks, that's Susan Sanders, one of my new neighbors."

A grunt was Susan Sanders' answer, as a black face was turned toward the deputy.

"No, no, Lizzie," said Marks, "I want to see that white woman who came into your shanty just now."

"Mr. Marks," declared the old negress belligerently, "that colored woman settin' there is the only soul that's come into my house today. Now, what you want?"

"We'll see," said Marks tersely, as he went to the back door to call his assistant inside.

"Watch these two women while I search this shanty," he commanded. And search he did from corner to corner of the two small rooms. The cramped garret he ransacked thoroughly. There was no cellar, and the windows had been too closely watched to have afforded Belle Starr a chance to escape.

But clearly she was not there. With a threat to have the negress arrested for helping to spirit her visitor away, Marks left the shanty and began a systematic search of the other houses on the street. Then he turned to the outbuildings and fence corners. But the quarry had clean escaped him. Neither he nor Thomas could construct a theory that would account for Belle Starr's disappear-

ance, though the matter was threshed out between them a dozen times.

"It comes to this," Marks confessed at last, "the only way to explain how she got away from us is either to believe that you missed her as she got through the back door, or that she used black magic to make herself invisible."

"That's all right for you," remarked Thomas, spiritedly, "but it doesn't satisfy me. She must have got out of the front door; I know she didn't go out the back way. And as for Voodoo work — well, I wouldn't use that excuse to explain things at Fort Smith."

Marks couldn't, of course, report to the authorities at Fort Smith that his game had escaped by dissolving into thin air. As he pondered the enigma he determined to make no report whatever, but to follow the elusive Belle Starr until he could get his grip on her slender wrist and know that she was in his clutches. Thomas was willing enough, since it was demonstrated that he was equally to blame for the fiasco, to suppress all mention of it.

Three days later, dressed in soiled overalls and the worn "jumper" and rusty diagonal coat of an itinerant farm hand, Marks appeared in the Caney Bottoms down on the Arkansas river. His moustache was gone, and he talked with the corrupted drawl of a Texas field laborer. At Pleas. Porter's farm, lying next to the ranch of old Tom Starr, Belle's father-in-law, Marks got employment at fifteen dollars a month harrowing a cornfield preparatory to planting.

The new hand from Texas proved to be a popular addition to the Porter working force. He could "jig" and do a "hoe-down" with a contagious effectiveness that won envious applause. He could call without hesitation the figures of the most complicated country "square dance."

"By Jacks, you got to come over to Starr's next Saturday evening and 'call' for the 'rag-out' that's goin' to be pulled off there," said Wes. Ferris, as "the Texas Heel-and-Toer" (Marks' name in the quarters) finished, in the lantern-lit cabin, a sort of Delsarte rendition of "Sandy Land."

"He sure will!" chimed in the other three men.

It was the chance the new hand had waited for. The two weeks in the wet corn land had palled on the deputy, unused to hard

she could and would shoot in resisting arrest if she had an even chance. He stepped back into the shelter of a tumbled-down fence and shifted his pistol forward on his belt. In his manner of approach to the cabin there was neither haste nor apparent purpose. Following the woman's example, he lifted the latch of the door and stepped inside. Old Lizzie Burns, the negress who owned the shanty, was at work by the window sorting a pile of newly laundered clothes. Another negress sat before the open fireplace, bonneted and smoking a dingy clay pipe. The early spring air was sharp outside, and the dying coals gave forth but little heat.

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"Susan, Mr. Marks wants to speak to you," Lizzie Burns said to the woman by the fire. "Mr. Marks, that's Susan Sanders, one of my new neighbors."

A grunt was Susan Sanders' answer, as a black face was turned toward the deputy.

"No, no, Lizzie," said Marks, "I want to see that white woman who came into your shanty just now."

"Mr. Marks," declared the old negress belligerently, "that colored woman settin' there is the only soul that's come into my house today. Now, what you want?"

"We'll see," said Marks tersely, as he went to the back door to call his assistant inside.

"Watch these two women while I search this shanty," he commanded. And search he did from corner to corner of the two small rooms. The cramped garret he ransacked thoroughly. There was no cellar, and the windows had been too closely watched to have afforded Belle Starr a chance to escape.

But clearly she was not there. With a threat to have the negress arrested for helping to spirit her visitor away, Marks left the shanty and began a systematic search of the other houses on the street. Then he turned to the outbuildings and fence corners. But the quarry had clean escaped him. Neither he nor Thomas could construct a theory that would account for Belle Starr's disappear-

ance, though the matter was threshed out between them a dozen times.

"It comes to this," Marks confessed at last, "the only way to explain how she got away from us is either to believe that you missed her as she got through the back door, or that she used black magic to make herself invisible."

"That's all right for you," remarked Thomas, spiritedly, "but it doesn't satisfy me. She must have got out of the front door; I know she didn't go out the back way. And as for Voodoo work — well, I wouldn't use that excuse to explain things at Fort Smith."

Marks couldn't, of course, report to the authorities at Fort Smith that his game had escaped by dissolving into thin air. As he pondered the enigma he determined to make no report whatever, but to follow the elusive Belle Starr until he could get his grip on her slender wrist and know that she was in his clutches. Thomas was willing enough, since it was demonstrated that he was equally to blame for the fiasco, to suppress all mention of it.

Three days later, dressed in soiled overalls and the worn "jumper" and rusty diagonal coat of an itinerant farm hand, Marks appeared in the Caney Bottoms down on the Arkansas river. His moustache was gone, and he talked with the corrupted drawl of a Texas field laborer. At Pleas. Porter's farm, lying next to the ranch of old Tom Starr, Belle's father-in-law, Marks got employment at fifteen dollars a month harrowing a cornfield preparatory to planting.

The new hand from Texas proved to be a popular addition to the Porter working force. He could "jig" and do a "hoe-down" with a contagious effectiveness that won envious applause. He could call without hesitation the figures of the most complicated country "square dance."

"By Jacks, you got to come over to Starr's next Saturday evening and 'call' for the 'rag-out' that's goin' to be pulled off there," said Wes. Ferris, as "the Texas Heel-and-Toer" (Marks' name in the quarters) finished, in the lantern-lit cabin, a sort of Delsarte rendition of "Sandy Land."

"He sure will!" chimed in the other three men.

It was the chance the new hand had waited for. The two weeks in the wet corn land had palled on the deputy, unused to hard

physical labor. Now he could go unsuspected to the Starr ranch, and if Belle Starr had gained its shelter he felt sure of getting an opportunity to make the arrest he had failed to make in Muscogee.

The Porter hands were eager to show off their prize prompter after the fiddlers had taken their place in an entry that gave upon two large rooms of the Starr log ranch house, but "the Texas Heel-and-Toer" begged them to be patient.

"Boys," he explained, "they got a right smart prompter here already, and I reckon I won't fo'ce mase'f fo'ward too soon. I'll just dance a few numbehs, and then if you-all wants me to, w'y I'll sing off a few like that 'Sandy Land' figger." But when he had sent the Porter hands off to find partners for the sets then forming, he appeared in no hurry to seek a "knock-down" to one of the Caney Bottom belles and shake a leg in the dance. He was waiting for one partner whom he hoped to take away with him on a first relay to Fort Smith before daylight came to end the dance.

Near the end of the second set, as the shirt-sleeved dancers swung the country girls lustily, stamping the bare floor appreciatively as they twisted in and out through the figures, the face Marks had waited to see appeared. Belle Starr came quietly out from the bedroom that had been turned into a dressing room for the women, and sat down in a chair against the wall.

"Oh! that girl, that pretty little girl,
The girl I left behind me!"

sang out the prompter in time with the two fiddlers who sawed and swayed with the fresh vigor of early evening. Belle Starr's slippered toes began to tap the floor in time with the prompter's singsong. Porter's new hand laid hold of an acquaintance and whispered a request in his ear.

"Sure, I'll give you a 'knock-down,'" the man nodded. "Come right over now." When the two stood before Belle Starr the new hand was presented:

"Mrs. Starr, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Jackson. Mr. Jackson, this is Mrs. Starr." The master of ceremonies withdrew.

"Is yo' next numbeh engaged, Mrs. Starr?" drawled "Mr. Jackson." "If it ain't I'd like right well to dance it with you."

"Certainly, Mr. Jackson," the woman replied. Following the custom, "Mr. Jackson" withdrew until the dancers in the next set should be called. The man from Texas improved the minutes after sauntering into the open yard to visit his saddle bags and transfer a pair of handcuffs and a small, but effective pistol to his pockets.

"She doesn't know me from Adam," he reflected, "but I'd as well be ready for surprises."

Belle Starr danced the set with "Mr. Jackson," of Texas. Two numbers down she promised him another dance, and before that was ended Marks began to understand why men fought for and shielded this woman. She was in the best of spirits — her wit struck fire from the Texan's drawling humor. Her black eyes flashed, her cheeks glowed with the pleasure of rhythmic motion. When the set was ended she cried out joyously:

"Bring my shawl, Mr. Jackson; we must go outside and get cool!"

Events were falling out to fit the deputy's plans. As he followed Belle Starr into the dark dooryard he vowed that he would have her on a horse behind his saddle in half an hour.

"How beautiful and cool it is out here, Mr. Marks!" she said quietly, as the two stood out of earshot of the house. The deputy raised his eyes swiftly to the woman's face, pale and impassive now under the starlight. And he had thought his disguise complete!

"Come with me — no, don't speak yet" — she went on, and led the way to a door that opened into an "L" of the main house. When Marks hesitated she threw the door wide and showed a room sparsely but tastefully furnished. A bed stood over against the wall, and a shaded lamp burned on a small table beside it. Not until Marks was half way across the room, still following Belle Starr's lead, did he see that a tiny figure, carefully wrapped, lay on the white counterpane.

"Tonight is the first that baby has slept well for three weeks," she said simply, as she bent over to arrange a pretty little lace cap about the child's pale forehead. "She was very, very ill, Mr. Marks, and when I got here I didn't think my little one would live. But I've nursed her night and day, and now she will soon get well. I was only afraid you'd come over from Porter's before

I could leave her." As Belle Starr stopped speaking she turned to stand before the deputy, docile, her eyes alight. Marks tried to speak, but he could only say weakly:

"I — I —, go on, Mrs. Starr." She took up her story, moving the lamp a little and turning it slightly lower as she spoke:

"I had to get here from Muscogee that day, Mr. Marks, I *had* to. My baby was calling me, and I tricked you bravely, though my heart was choking me for fear I'd fail. You want to know how I did it? Well, it was simple. I taxed my brain from the time I stepped on the station platform, where I saw you waiting, until I got almost to that negro shanty. The plan came to me in an instant. When I got inside that cabin I collared the old woman and made her swear not to give me away. I grabbed her bonnet and shawl and a big apron from a peg, and had them on before you turned in from the street. I lit that pipe (I found it on the mantel), and as I sat down I thrust my hands up the sooty chimney and did a lightning change from white to black on hands and face. When you came in I was all ready as 'Susan Sanders,' the old negro woman. Oh! I tell you, it was theatrical, but I just *had* to get here to see my child. You see?"

Marks nodded. How cleverly she had tricked him! What superb acting she was capable of! But it was neither the actress nor the reckless, criminal Belle Starr who spoke to him. She was now the mother, Marks could see that, altogether human in her joy over the infant's convalescence, trembling at the thought of its late peril. Yes, he saw. Belle Starr took up the story:

"Sam, my husband, is not here — he is away in Texas — and after I came I waited, caring for the baby, and expecting you to come any time. I should have died before going with you as long as my little girl needed me. Now, she may be left with her grandmother. I suppose you want me to go to Fort Smith?"

For a long time Marks did not answer. It was not easy to decide this question. At last he queried:

"Mrs. Starr, did you help Sam steal those horses of Bailey's, and help break into the postoffice at Wagoner?"

"Are you trying me, Mr. Marks, before the court at Fort Smith gets a chance?"

"I wish you would give me a straight answer," he replied.

"Then I will tell you the truth." She looked squarely into the deputy's eyes. "I tried to keep Sam out of both those scrapes, but I *did* shield him when he'd got into trouble, and I made myself an accessory in the eyes of the law. I'm not trying to justify myself, Mr. Marks. My life has been stormy for a good many years. But ever since I've had my baby I've wanted to settle down to a quiet existence. Oh, I've wanted to so badly!"

Then Marks, the cynical, cool, man-hunting Marks, leaned over to touch the sleeping child's cool forehead and, turning judge and jury all at once, he pronounced:

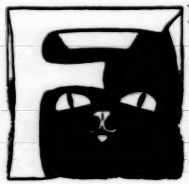
"Baby, you need your mother more than I or the law." He turned to Belle Starr and asked quietly:

"Shall we dance in the next set, Mrs. Starr, or are you too tired?"

"Oh, let us dance, by all means," she said, and slipped her hand into his with a pressure that conveyed a world of gratitude.

In Great Lost Canyon.*

BY GEORGE MORRISON RICHARDS.



IVE days now the storm had gripped the world, setting its white fangs in every corner of those barren hills, its wild breath, exultant in its power, never ceasing save now and then to heap some treacherous drift or crush to earth some monarch pine, uncounted winters old. Five days and still the norther raged in triumph through the Great Lost Canyon while all nature cringed before its merciless sweep.

The Cougar stirred restlessly. For the hundredth time that day she crept to the cave's mouth and peered out into the biting ice-needles. Her gaunt form shivered when, with a sudden twist, the blast beat into the den. As she stood, a half-snarl showing her white teeth, she slowly turned to listen; it was not a cry, only a plaintive whisper, but she knew the sound — the dying voice of a dying kit, her kit, dying, dying, dying because she, its mother, could not find one living thing in all that changeless waste to satisfy the blood-hunger. No creature moved there and every trail followed cold and hopeless. The Cougar knew. Had she not, time after time, mocked the power of those pitiless elements that shook her frame as she herself would shake a rabbit? Had she not defied their rage, and answered, growl for growl, their challenge through the leafless trees! But she knew now, at last, that starvation and cold had conquered her; but no, it should not be until the death, the very death; with a hoarse growl she sprang into the storm; to fight a last fight for life — her life? Even as she sprang, she caught again, in a lull of the wind, that whispered, dying voice.

For hours the Cougar pressed on and on, driven before the winds like a ship in the grasp of a typhoon, on and on, dragging her heavy feet over the endless miles. Once she stopped, trembling

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with excitement as she thought she heard the rustle of some animal escaping off to the right. With all her strength, breasting the deep snow, she bounded toward the sound. A dead limb had fallen through the lower branches of a tree. Once too, long afterward, her eyes no more alert for danger, she fell through the half-tunneled drift of a hidden stream, now stilled and rigid in its rocky bed. As she lay with the loose snow about her she made no move; her head sank slowly. But after a time the Cougar's nose began to work — food! No phantom hope this time, and Life stepped back from the very threshold. With frenzied haste she nosed about in the choking dry snow. At last! stiff and frozen though it was, as hard as ice itself, she closed her teeth upon a tiny feathered bundle, some hapless mountain-wren victim of the blizzard. The Cougar struggled up the bank, she must carry it back, back those weary miles, beating against the white stings which she knew and hated. But, even as she turned, the kit's last chance was gone. The Cougar had swallowed her still-found prey; that terrible cry of nature had silenced even mother-love.

Guiltily she slunk on her way again, but as the bit of flesh began to warm her freezing blood a new spirit seemed to invade her being. She growled deep in her throat, while a great passion appeared to sweep across her brutal brain. In that moment she had lost the one great blessing and curse of all wild animals — fear. Again that deep growl as she lifted her great head and stood motionless, watching through the swirling snow that long line of trees running toward the west.

Behind those trees a log-house sent its blue smoke toward the sky every day. The Cougar had often seen it.

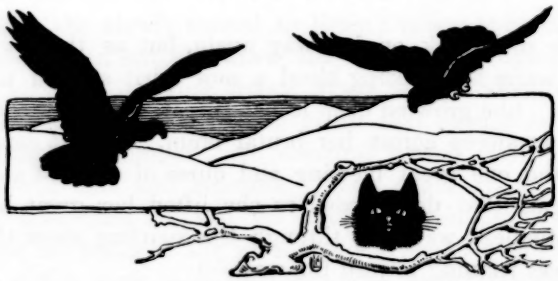
. . . . . .

"Will it ever end? Such a storm!" The woman spoke aloud as she stood looking out of the small square window at her seven-year-old son getting an armful of fuel at the wood-pile. "Will father ever come — " suddenly her breath seems to leave her body. That dull gray shape! Nearer, nearer! She screams and crashes the little pane to bits, too late, too late! She falls fainting to the floor, and simultaneously a rifle shot rings out on the heavy air and echoes and re-echoes away through the snow-buried hills.

"It's all right" said the man as he dashed some water upon his wife's face. "I got him, and just in time too. See, here's Bill, a little scared, that's all. Never heard of a painter-cat gettin' so devilish bold; guess I'll hav't to get some o' the boys over on the Crick and shoot up some o' these critters. It's gettin' so a man can't leave his home one day without somethin' tryin' to do for him or his family."

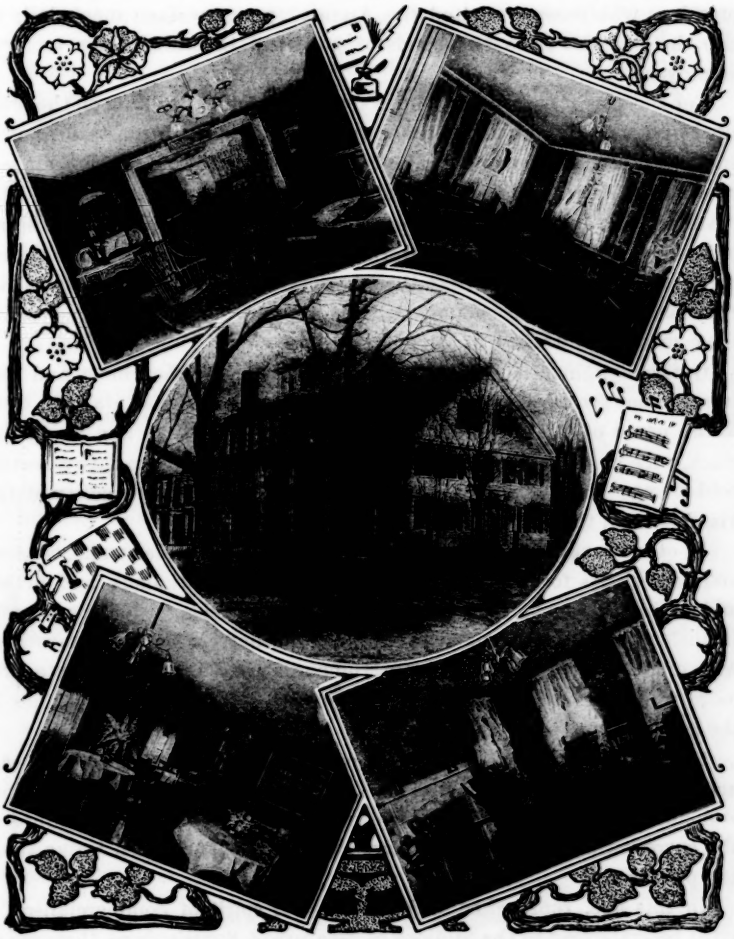
. . . . . .

Miles away, in the Great Lost Canyon, a whispered voice grew still.



A Woman's Club on a New Plan

Though this is the day of the New Woman, it remained for man to successfully inaugurate the newest idea in Woman's clubs—a club whose membership is composed exclusively of the army of clever women workers employed by Alexander E. Little & Company of Lynn, Massachusetts, in the production of Sorosis Shoes.



THE SOROSIS ANNEX

While Mr. Little personally understands every detail of shoe-making, he also understands that though his factory is the only one in the whole world that makes its own lasts, and though it buys only the best and cost-

liest materials, employs the most skilled labor, uses specially designed machinery and sends shoes for both sexes and all ages to every quarter of the globe, — yet not the hand and the head alone, but the *heart* as well, must co-operate in order to produce and maintain perfection.

Hence the idea of the "Sorosis Annex," where mutual esteem and friendship are cultivated and where, in the words of a leading college president who recently visited the Annex, "young women meet daily to clip the coupons from the bonds of good-will that bind them to their employers."

For the uses of this unique club a spacious colonial dwelling on the principal residence street was purchased and fitted up with the most substantial and suitable appointments, combining feminine daintiness with their serviceable qualities. The resulting atmosphere is distinctly homelike. The "Annex" is a benefaction, but not an institution of charity. The spirit of independence of the modern working woman is respected, and nominal membership fees contribute to the support of the club which, besides the customary officers and committees, has a competent matron to care for the comfort and welfare of the members.

In this delightful social atmosphere the young women meet and find refreshment for mind and body. The dining-room can read its title clear to the name of "Dutch Room" in its tiles and pictures and its quaint clock, such as one may really see in Holland, while an up-to-date scientific cold-storage plant assures the wholesome and appetizing quality of the viands served there.

In other parts of the club-house are games for the wide awake, couches and easy chairs for the weary, solid books for the studious, and fiction and periodicals and newspapers for all. Those who wish to write find facilities to hand, while she who can entertain herself and her companions with music is provided with the instrument, as well as her shopmate with more utilitarian talent who takes advantage of the sewing machines in the handiwork room of the club.

Both within and without the "Sorosis Annex" has more the appearance of the private home of interesting people than the conventional club-house, and the air of private ownership is enhanced by a glimpse of the surrounding grounds, the piazzas, and the well-planned walks about the premises.

In this age, reproached with a universal spirit of commercialism, it must be gratifying to the millions of wearers of Sorosis shoes throughout the world to learn that their favorite foot-wear is produced amid such surroundings by cheerful workers, exhilarated by so charming an atmosphere.

Coffee Tremors

One of the sources of nervous tremors that annoy so many persons may be found in the use of coffee as a beverage.

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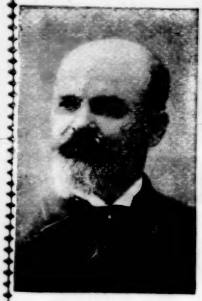

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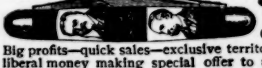

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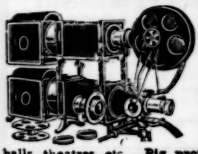

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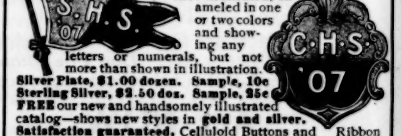

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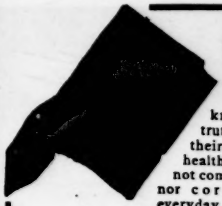

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Depends largely on a knowledge of the whole truth about self and sex and their relation to life and health. This knowledge does not come intelligently of itself, nor correctly from ordinary everyday sources.

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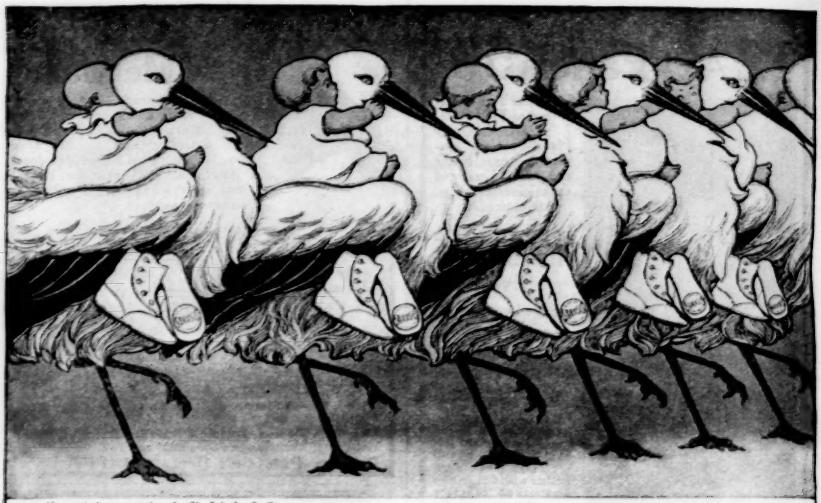

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A Protest Against Race Suicide

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Write for it to-day.

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Established 1854

459 Whitlock Avenue, - Borough Bronx New York City

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The 1907 calendar of N. W. Ayer & Son, the Philadelphia advertising agents, is just out, and as usual it is one of the season's best office calendars.

They have followed the same design used in 1906, but their famous medal and motto "Keeping Everlastingly At It Brings Success" appear on a bronze background, which gives it an exceedingly rich appearance. While the Calendar is arranged with a month on each flap the figures are clearly legible across a large room. The blank spaces on the flaps are filled with new and pointed epigrams on advertising and business-building in general.

The calendar is too expensive for general distribution, but while they last, Ayer & Son will mail a copy to any address upon receipt of twenty-five cents.

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A kind of soap you haven't seen. Not a cake, but a book of soap. Purely vegetable from Mexican plant. Hygienic, pleasant, makes quick lather. No contagion by using SAN-ITO soap. Conveniently carried in vest pocket or purse. Send 10 cents in stamps for book to COLE MERCANTILE CO. (Manufacturers' Agents), OLD FORGE, N. Y.

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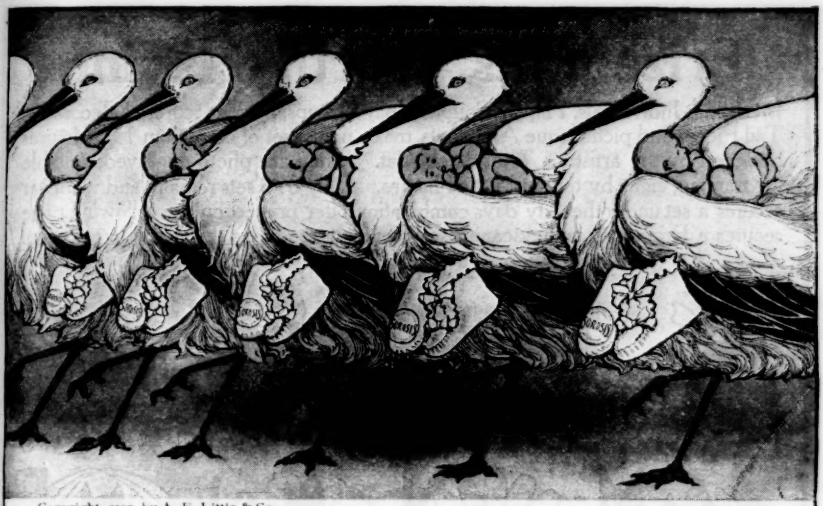

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Pittsburg	Albany	Cincinnati	St. Louis	Liverpool	Berlin	Honolulu
Washington	Troy	Toledo	Denver	Manchester	Frankfort a. m.	Havana
Baltimore	Syracuse	Cleveland	Omaha	Birmingham	Hamburg	
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SOROSIS TRADE MARK

These designs represent two of the many new SOROSIS models for adults. The advantage of the gore shoe is that it is on or off without the bother of laces or buttons. The elastic sides are guaranteed to outwear the shoe.

NEW FUN FOR BOYS DANCING SKELETON 10c.
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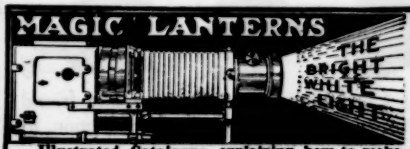

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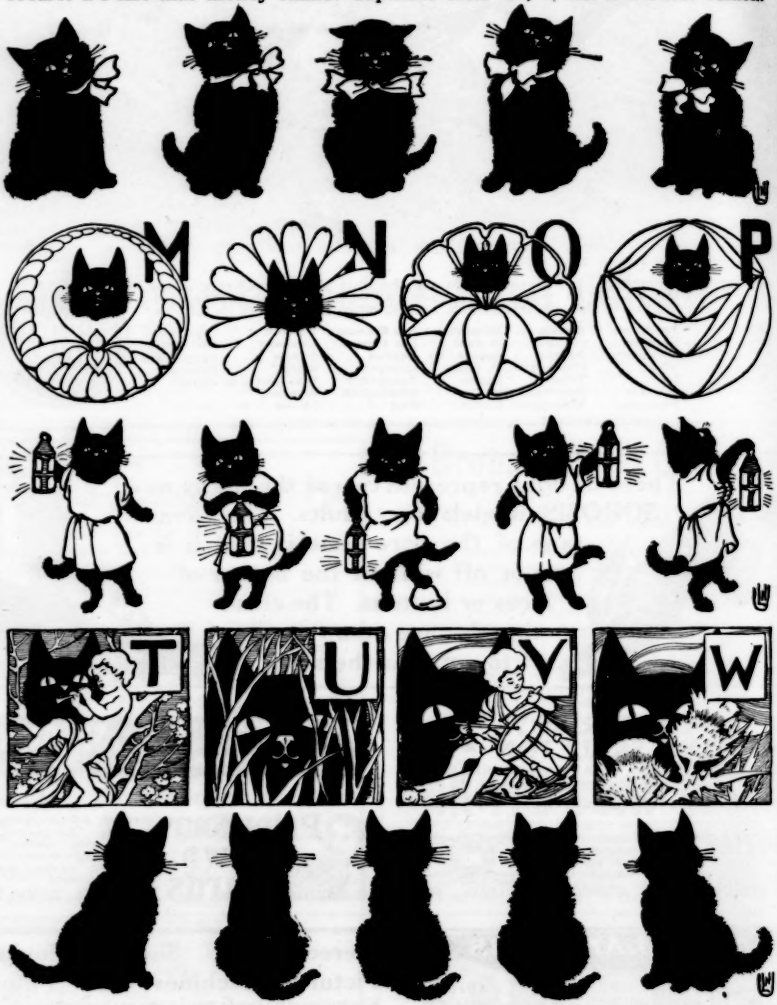

The entire set forms an array of Cat Cleverness that will make any friend happy. The Pictures may be sent to one address and the subscription to The Black Cat to another, we paying postage in each case.

Cherry Blossom
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This Jolly Pair

represents two of the 150 Clever Pictures designed by the artist of The Black Cat, and which for the next 60 days may be secured under the following Half Price combination offer.

There are 870 sets left. When these are gone we cannot furnish a set at any price, as this is the last edition.

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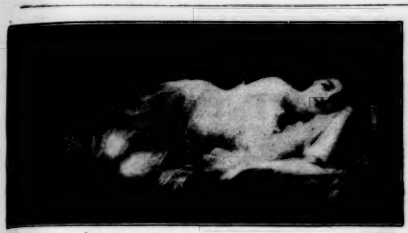

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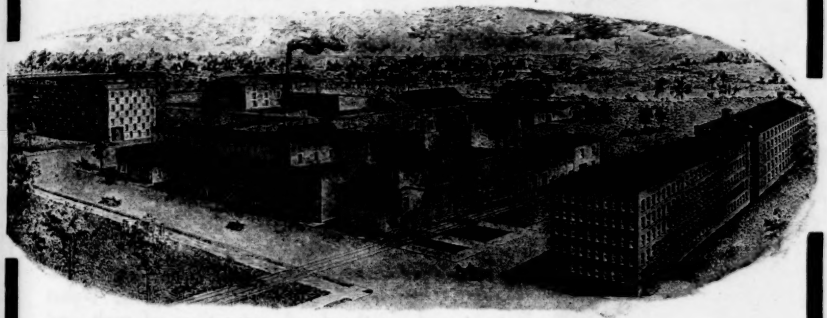
In our own Registered Distillery, No. 2, Tenth District, Ohio, under the direct supervision of the U. S. Internal Revenue Department.



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4 FULL QUARTS $3.20 EXPRESS PREPAID

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Send us your order
Money back if you are not perfectly pleased

OUR OFFER We will ship you in a plain sealed case, with no marks to show contents, FOUR FULL QUART BOTTLES OF HAYNER PRIVATE STOCK BOTTLED IN BOND WHISKEY for $3.20, and we will pay the express charges. Take it home and sample it, have your doctor test it—every bottle if you wish. Then if you don't find it perfectly satisfactory, ship it back to us AT OUR EXPENSE and your $3.20 will be promptly refunded. How could any offer be fairer? Write our nearest office and mention "Division 225".

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Guaranteed to wear one year without splitting

You **will know** the minute you see it, that it equals in beauty, fit and style any silk skirt you have ever owned. We **know** and time will prove to you that it has far greater durability. If you are not satisfied send back the skirt, and your money — all of it — will reach you by return mail.

Silver-silk pleases you in a way of its own — its lustre, lightness, rustle and "feel" are like taffeta silk, but unlike taffeta it **positively will not split, tear or crack** — we guarantee this and will replace the petticoat without expense to you if it splits or tears within one year.

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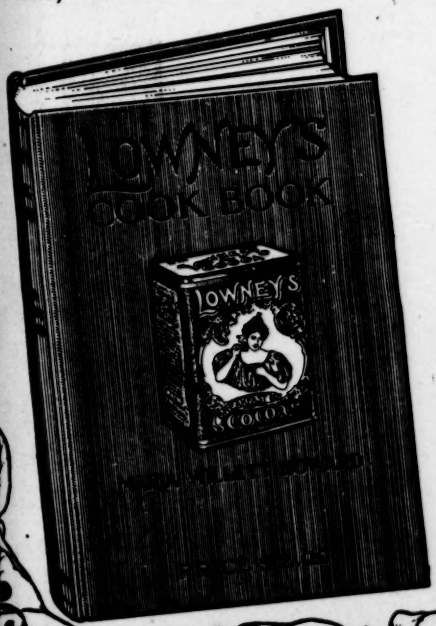

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